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SMALL FARM *digest*

VOLUME 1, NOS. 3 & 4 – SPRING/SUMMER 1998

USDA Develops Centers To Assist Rural America

USDA is establishing four National Centers of Excellence across the country.

The Centers are designed to serve the Administration's Community Empowerment Initiative by providing technical expertise to rural America.

"This program is an investment toward breaking the cycle of poverty," said USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Jill Long Thompson. "Not only will it help to better serve the people of rural America, but it will also empower communities to help themselves." The Centers will be located at the University of Texas Pan American in Edinburg, TX; Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena, MS; Somerset Community College in Somerset, KY; and Heritage College in Toppenish, WA.

Each Center of Excellence will receive \$100,000 from the Fund for Rural America, established by Congress in the 1996 Farm Bill to assist rural communities. The Centers will provide the communities with better access to Federal and State assistance, facilities for leadership training, improved communication capabilities, and economic development resources.

A Peace Corps Fellow has been assigned to each Center of Excellence and to the USDA Office of Community Development to assist as a liaison between the academic institutions and rural communities. Illinois State University in Normal, IL, will manage this aspect of the program. ■



Organic food makes dollars and "sense" at many roadside markets. — USDA PHOTO/ WILLIAM E. CARNAHAN

USDA To Revise Proposed Organic Standards Rule

On May 8, USDA Secretary Dan Glickman announced that USDA will make fundamental revisions to its proposed national organic standards as a result of more than 220,000 comments USDA received on the initial proposal. "USDA is committed to developing national organic standards that organic farmers and consumers will embrace," Glickman said. "Thousands of commenters requested that USDA issue revised proposed standards, and we intend to do so. Most importantly, the revised proposal will contain fundamental changes from our initial draft."

The earlier draft, published on December 16, 1997, proposed standards for growing, processing, labeling, importing, and certifying

organically grown food. But it did not take a position on certain controversial issues, asking instead for public comment on these items. The bulk of the extraordinary number of comments opposed the labeling of products of biotechnology as organic, the use of irradiation in organic food processing, and the application of biosolids (municipal sludge) in organic food production.

"Biotechnology, irradiation, and biosolids are safe and have important roles to play in agriculture, but they neither fit current organic practices nor meet current consumer expectations about organics, as the comments made clear," said Glickman. "Therefore, these products and practices will not be included in our revised proposal, and food produced with these products and practices will not be allowed to bear the organic label."

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Websites Offer Small Farm Information

A number of organizations maintain websites with information of interest to small farmers and ranchers and their communities. Interested individuals may wish to visit some of the websites listed below.

- Agriculture Network Information Center (<http://www.agnic.org>). The Center, part of USDA's National Agricultural Library, includes directories of agriculture-related Internet information resources and agricultural experts as well as an on-line reference service.
- Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (<http://www.attra.org>). Select "Newsletters" to see ATTRA's newsletter and "Publications" to see a publications list.
- Farm-A-Syst and Home-A-Syst (<http://www.wisc.edu/farmasyst>). These national programs, housed at the University of Wisconsin, help farmers and homeowners conduct self-assessments of potential hazards to well water and other environmental risks on their property. State contacts are provided.
- Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture (<http://www.kerrcenter.com>). This organization focuses on ecologically and economically sound farming strategies. Select "Newsletter" to browse current and back issues of the Center's newsletter and "Publications" to see a publications catalog.
- Organic Farmers Marketing Association (<http://web.iquest.net/ofma>). Individuals may access this website to gain information on organic certification, standards, and legislation and to link with other sites of inter-

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Int'l Conference on Women in Agriculture

"Planning for the New Millennium" is the theme of the Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture (ICWA), to be hosted by the United States June 28-July 2 in Washington, DC. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is Honorary Chair of the conference. The meeting, sponsored by The President's Interagency Council on Women, is being chaired by USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Jill Long Thompson.

Open to women from all walks of life in agricultural communities, the conference is designed as a forum in which participants can share experiences and learn more about successful farming and agribusiness

techniques. Presentations and small-group sessions will center on three topics: the business of agriculture, the agricultural economy, and the agricultural community.

This year's conference will continue the work begun at the First International Conference on Women in Agriculture, held in Melbourne, Australia, in July 1994. *Women in Agriculture: Farming for our Future*, a report summarizing the Melbourne conference, is available from ICWA.

For further information, contact the Second International Conference on Women in Agriculture, Rm. 206-W, Jamie L. Whitten Federal Bldg., USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250 (telephone: 202/720-4356; fax: 202/205-3658) or visit the Conference web page (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/icwa>). ■

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202/720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Your Small Farm Neighbors

'Thinking Organic'

Organic farming is the subject of much discussion across the Nation as small farmers evaluate organic farming methods and the potential impact of national standards on their businesses. Seeking individual perspectives, Small Farm Digest asked five members of the small farm community residing in California, Florida, and Maryland to share their views.



"Organic farming seems so natural," says **Marty Rice**, operator of a 75-acre farm near Frederick, MD, and

founding member and former board member of the Maryland Organic Food and Farming Association. "It provides a market niche for small, family-oriented farms like ours and lets us regenerate the things we take from the land in our farming practices. Nature should be allowed to work on behalf of agriculture without the interference of pesticides and herbicides. This pays off in better soil, air, and water quality; a healthier environment for farm workers; an increased profit margin at the market; and reduced costs to other Earth systems.

"I care about organic farming," Marty continues. "That's why I'm concerned about organic labeling. I want labels that will ensure consumer choice and that will allow organic food to be grown in healthy cooperation with nature."



Judith Redmond, Executive Director of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers in Davis, CA, would like to see stricter standards for organic practices. "Farmers want their

customers to be able to trust the term 'organic,'" she says. "Tougher standards would pay off in increased consumer trust."

Judith works with organic and conventional farmers, environmentalists, urban residents, and others concerned about the social and environmental dimensions of agriculture in California. The Alliance's initiatives include technical assistance programs to assist California farmers in reducing pesticide use as well as outreach programs to help California's urban residents re-establish a sense of connection with the land.



"Organic production can be economical and thus is an option friendly to small farmers," says **Marty Mesh**,

Executive Director of Florida Certified Organic Growers and Consumers, Inc. (FOG), in Gainesville, FL. Marty speaks from experience: For the past 22 years, he has helped produce 40 acres of watermelons organically at Bellevue Gardens Organic Farm near Gainesville.

"I hope the final national organic standards will make a sharp distinction between organic and conventionally produced products," Marty continues. "We need to give consumers a clear choice. They need to be confident that organic products meet minimum consistent standards nationwide." Marty is also interested in innovative funding mechanisms to promote organic production and fund a national organic program.

"I feel that a national program of organic standards will benefit consumers," says **Rosie Koenig**, operator of a small farm near Gainesville, FL. Rosie grows 10 acres of several types of vegetables, supplying fresh produce to 3 local farmers and 70

families in a community-supported agriculture group.

"Implementing a national organic rule is difficult, and I am sympathetic to the hugeness of the task," she reflects. "However, I'd like the final rule to protect the small farmer from having to pay a disproportionate share of certification fees. I would like to see consideration of a sliding fee schedule, based on the size of the organic operation."



Certification fees also are an issue for **Solomon Teklu**, owner of Belless Nursery in Davis, CA.

Solomon is a member of the California Organic Foods Advisory Board and a part-time employee of the University of California Small Farm Center. "USDA should allow growers with lower profits to pay lower certification fees than growers with higher annual profits," he says.

In Solomon's view, public demand for organic products will continue into the next century. "There is a market for anything organic," he says, "provided that products have certified integrity and quality." He hopes that agricultural research and education will help organic growers increase their ability to farm successfully under a variety of conditions and in a wide range of climates.

Small Farm Digest will continue to keep readers informed of developments in the revision of the proposed national organic standards. (See "USDA To Revise Proposed Organic Standards Rule," p. 1.)

SFD IS ON THE WEB

To read *Small Farm Digest*, access <http://www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm>

A wide range of resources are available to assist small farmers and ranchers and their communities. Readers wishing further information about the resources described below are asked to contact the individuals or offices listed for each item.



PRINT MEDIA

A Place in the Country: The Acreage Owner's Guide. This 15-page brochure provides tips on rural living, with sections on assessing the rural life; landowners' responsibilities; acreage planning; exploring horticulture; evaluating drinking water; protecting surface water quality; handling waste water; managing wastes; understanding soil resources; controlling pests; keeping animals; and living with wildlife. Single copies are available at no cost. To order, contact University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, 211 Agricultural Hall, Lincoln, NE 68583-0703 (telephone: 402/472-2966; fax: 402/472-5557).

Ag Opportunities. This newsletter addresses issues related to small farms, new family farms, and agricultural alternatives. Subscriptions are \$10 per year (free for Missouri residents). For further information, contact Debi Kelly, *Ag Opportunities*, Missouri Alternatives Center, 628 Clark Hall, Columbia, MO 65211 (telephone: 1-800/433-3704 [Missouri residents only] or 573/882-1905). Current and back issues are accessible via the Internet (<http://www.ext.missouri.edu/agebb/mac>).

Fungi Perfecti. A catalog of gourmet mushroom cultivation equipment and supplies is available for \$3.00



plus \$1.50 shipping. To order, contact Fungi Perfecti, P.O. Box 7634, Olympia, WA 98507 (telephone: 1-800/780-9126; home page: <http://www.fungi.com>).

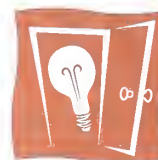
Goat Rancher. Published monthly, this commercial goat meat industry magazine covers a variety of topics, including Boer goats and goat breeding. Subscriptions are \$25 per year. For further information, contact Terry Hankins, Editor and Publisher, 731 Sandy Branch Rd., Sarah, MS 38665 (telephone: 601/562-9529).

How To Farm For Profit: Practical Enterprise Analysis. Written by Donald M. Fedie, this 116-page book on profitable farming includes a business forecast and marketing plan. The price is \$19.95. To order, contact Beverly Fisher, Iowa State University Press (telephone: 1-800/862-6657; fax: 515/292-3348; e-mail: caesadm@caes.state.ct.u).

Natural Disaster Assistance Available from USDA. A free 8-page program aid (No. 1328) describes ways in which various USDA agencies help people cope with natural disasters such as floods, droughts, hurricanes, fires, storms, tornados, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. Topics include emergency food assistance, low-interest loans to farmers and rural residents for farms and housing, restoring damaged land, disease and insect control, food safety, and other areas. To order, contact USDA Disas-

ter Management Coordination staff (telephone: 202/720-5711; fax: 202/720-7708; e-mail: dmcs@usda.gov) or access the USDA Disaster Management Coordination Staff home page (<http://www.usda.gov/da/disaster.html>).

Organic Production: Recent Publications and Current Information Sources. This 30-page USDA publication, available free of charge, lists resources for organic farming, including markets, directories, and computer networks. To order, contact Mary Gold, National Agricultural Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 10301 Baltimore Blvd., Rm. 304, Beltsville, MD 20705-2351 (telephone: 301/504-6559; fax: 301/504-6409; e-mail: mgold@nal.usda.gov).



PROGRAMS

Agriculture and Food Fair. The University of the Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture have jointly developed an initiative to promote small farm efforts through the U.S. Virgin Islands' annual Agriculture and Food Fair. Among the highlights are award presentations to outstanding farmers, students, and agribusinesses in the region and the showcasing of research and extension education in exhibits for the Virgin Islands community. The number of participants in the fair has grown from 5,000 in 1971 to more than 30,000 in 1997, making this activity one of the islands' largest. For further information, contact Clinton George, University of the Virgin Islands, RR02, Box 10,000, Kingshill, St. Croix, VI 00850 (telephone: 809/692-4071; fax: 809/692-4085). ■

A number of grant, loan, and training programs are available to support small farmers and their communities. Examples of such programs are summarized below. Readers wishing additional information are asked to contact the individuals or offices listed for each item.



GRANTS, LOANS, TRAINING

Conservation Fund Loans for Wetlands. Loans of up to \$400,000 are available from the Conservation Fund for the purchase of flood-prone and bluff lands that are environmentally sensitive or threatened by development that does not fit in with local government planning. The Fund can provide loans to a variety of agencies—including land trusts, nonprofit groups, and government resource agencies—for the purchase of land in the Upper Mississippi River corridor and its tributaries. For further information, contact Peg Kohring, The Conservation Fund, 70 N. 22nd Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55411-2237 (telephone: 612/521-1237; fax: 612/521-2376; e-mail: pkohring@aol.com).

Environmental Compliance Assistance Grants. CSREES has entered into a partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Agriculture Compliance Assistance Center through FY 2002 to promote agricultural community compliance with environmental requirements. EPA has allotted \$710,000 for two projects that will provide user-friendly information materials and develop model training and technical assistance programs.

One project, aimed at agricultural producers in general, will foster

understanding of and compliance with environmental requirements. The other project will be targeted at livestock producers' understanding of and compliance with environmental requirements that affect livestock management, including feeding operations. The projects may be conducted by a single land-grant university or a consortium of land-grant universities and other partners.

For more information, contact Denis Ebodaghe, CSREES National Program Leader for Small Farms (202/401-4385 or debodaghe@reeusda.gov). For EPA-related questions about environmental regulations, contact Ginah Mortensen, EPA (1-888/663-2155 or mortensen.ginah@epamail.epa.gov).

Managing Information with Rural America Initiative. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is in the second year of a grant program to help rural communities enhance their economic viability using modern technological advances in information systems and electronic communications. Under the Managing Information with Rural America Initiative, awards are available in three interdependent categories: Clusters of Community Teams, Support Organizations, and Policy Organizations.

For application materials and guidelines, contact the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Food Systems/Rural Development, One Michigan Avenue East, Battle Creek, MI 49017-4058 (telephone: 616/968-1611; fax:

616/968-0413). Information also is available on the Foundation's home page (<http://www.wkkf.org>).

Support for Rural Co-ops and Businesses. USDA and the private sector are working together to boost the Nation's rural economy and create or preserve rural jobs through USDA's Business and Industry (B&I) Guaranteed Loan Program. The program benefits rural areas by guaranteeing loans extended by eligible local lenders to rural co-ops and businesses.

Administered by USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS), the program typically guarantees losses of up to 80 per cent of the original loan amount. The inability of borrowers to obtain other credit is not a requirement.

Borrowers first seek financing from a local lender in their area, and the lender in turn seeks a guarantee from USDA. Existing or new cooperatives in rural areas may use B&I loan guarantees to invest in machinery and equipment or real estate or to obtain working capital. Family farmers can use the B&I loan guarantees to help pay for stock in a start-up cooperative that processes their agricultural commodity into a value-added product.

For more information on the program, contact any USDA Rural Development Office in your State or the national office of USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service in Washington, DC (202/720-0813). Information also is available on the RBS home page (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>). ■

CSREES Small Farm InfoLine
1-800/583-3071

Low-Till Subsoiler Reaps Benefits

A recently improved low-till parabolic subsoiler has been causing a stir in farming circles. The implement, developed by agricultural engineer Gordon Tupper at the Mississippi Delta Research and Extension Center in Stoneville, MS, is designed to break up the ground with minimal surface disturbance—thereby leaving vegetation in place and reducing soil erosion.

"This subsoiler reduces soil surface disturbance and can increase cotton profits by nearly \$33 an acre," Tupper says. Properly used on just a portion of Mississippi's 1 million acres of cotton, the equipment has the potential to increase profits in the state by several million dollars a year."

The original parabolic subsoiler, which Tupper invented in 1972, is widely considered to have revolutionized deep tillage. The apparatus features a distinctive "C"-shaped curve, allowing a tractor to pull the equipment at a rate 11.4 percent faster than is possible for other subsoilers. The foot breaks up the hardpan as it moves through the ground at a depth of about 16 inches. The shank leans



The no-till parabolic subsoiler moves fractured soil clods aside rather than lifting them to the surface, leaving vegetation in place and reducing soil erosion. —PHOTO BY GORDON TUPPER

out at 28 degrees and moves fractured soil clods aside rather than lifting them to the surface.

The new design, Tupper says, reduces power requirements by about 15 percent over the old design, which was approximately 30 percent more efficient than its competitors. The plow can be used on many crops, but it works best on cotton because of the plant's sparse root structure.

"So far, we have found that it works best to run the subsoiler across the field at a 45-degree angle in the fall, and then to subsoil in the row direc-

tion in the spring," Tupper says. Recent design work on the equipment enables deep application of fertilizer along with the subsoiling action.

To date, at least six companies have produced and are selling the redesigned subsoiler. More than 250 of the new model were in operation as of fall 1997. For further information, contact Gordon Tupper, Mississippi Delta Research and Extension Center, P.O. Box 197, Stoneville, MS 38776 (telephone: 601/686-9311; fax: 601/686-7336; or e-mail: grtupper@drec.msstate.edu). ■

WEBSITES CONTINUED FROM PG. 2

est to consumers and the organic community. The website includes a bulletin board that can be used to buy or sell organic products or to exchange information on issues.

- Small Farm Resource (<http://www.farminfo.org>). This organization disseminates information useful to people with small farms or rural property. Much of the information comes from small farmers.

- USDA National Commission on Small Farms (<http://www.reeusda.gov>).

<http://www.reeusda.gov>).

gov/agsys/smallfarm/ncosf.htm). Access this website for general information on the Commission as well as *A Time to Act: A Report of the USDA National Commission on Small Farms* (January 1998). The Commission's report, which includes 8 policy goals and 146 recommendations, can be downloaded and printed.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture (<http://www.usda.gov>). Select "About USDA" for general background and "Agencies" for information on USDA agencies.

- Washington State University's College of Agriculture and Home Economics Information Department (<http://www.caheinfo.wsu.edu>). Select "Publications" to search for a bulletin or video title or for a subject by keyword. An on-line catalog of publications includes listings under agriculture, animals, community, family and home, forestry, plants, and other topics.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not warrant the usefulness or value of information provided on non-USDA websites. ■

Farmers' Markets Feature Small Farm Produce

The USDA Farmers' Market Program invites small farmers from Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and other States to meet in Washington, DC, each week during the summer and early fall to offer local customers freshly harvested produce. The markets are coordinated by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) with the assistance of other agencies and the USDA Employee Services and Recreation Association.

"Farmers' markets provide small farmers with direct access to consumers," said Enrique Figueroa, AMS Administrator, "while improving consumers' access to fresh produce and other farm products." The events also provide an opportunity to showcase the contributions of small farms and the benefits of farmers' markets.

The markets are held on the USDA grounds every Thursday from July to

November and on the grounds of the Departments of Energy, Labor, State, and Transportation at other times. A Capitol Hill market will be scheduled later in the summer, and an additional market at USDA will be offered a few days before Thanksgiving.

MORE ON MARKETS

For a list of farmers' markets in your area,

- Access "Find a Farmers' Market in Your State" on the AMS home page (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>).
- Order the *1996 National Farmers' Market Directory* from AMS, USDA, Rm. 2642-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456 (1-800/384-8704). A new edition will be available September 1.

Food stamps are welcome at all of the markets, and many of the farmers are certified to accept coupons from USDA's Special Supplemental Nutri-

tion Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in the District of Columbia. "Under the recent expansion of the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, greater numbers of at-risk mothers and children can purchase fresh fruits and vegetables," said Shirley Watkins, Under Secretary of USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services mission area, which administers the WIC Program. "We are pleased that so many of the farmers participating in the USDA Farmers' Market Program in the District of Columbia have been certified to accept WIC coupons for the upcoming season."

As each market day ends, personnel from the District of Columbia's Central Kitchen, a nonprofit group affiliated with the national antihunger organization Food Chain, gather vendor-donated food for distribution to the hungry. For further information, contact the Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA (1-800/384-8704; fax: 202/720-8477) or visit the AMS home page (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/>). ■

STANDARDS...CONTINUED FROM PG. 1

Similarly, many of the comments asserted that national organic standards must be rigorous and credible. Otherwise, commenters expressed concern that consumers will lose faith in the organic label.

"If organic farmers and consumers reject our national standards, we have failed," Glickman said. "Our task is to stimulate the growth of organic agriculture, ensure that consumers have confidence in the products that bear the organic label, and develop export markets for this growing industry."

PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT

The pending revisions in the proposed standards are an outgrowth of USDA's efforts to solicit input on the rule from

a wide range of interested individuals and groups. Comments from organic food producers, processors, marketers, the scientific community, consumers, and others were received in public meetings held in Austin, TX, Feb. 12; Ames, IA, Feb. 18; Seattle, WA, Feb. 26; and New Brunswick, NJ, March 5. USDA also accepted comments on the rule via mail, fax, and the Internet and doubled the comment period from 45 to 90 days.

Before publishing the revised proposed rule, USDA will evaluate the comments submitted in response to the December 1997 proposal. This record will guide the drafting of the revised proposal, which USDA will issue for public comment later this year.

"This additional opportunity for

public comment will assist us in crafting rigorous, credible national standards for organic farming and handling that organic farmers and consumers can support," said Glickman.

The market for organic food, totaling \$3.5 billion in 1996, has grown more than 40-fold since 1986. The new regulations will set a uniform national standard and will help remove some of the barriers that farmers encounter in growing and marketing organic products.

The revised proposed rule will be published in the *Federal Register* and will be available via the Internet. For additional information, visit the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's National Organic Program website (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/>). ■

UPCOMING

EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION	CONTACT
June 26	<i>Marketing and Value-Added Alternatives for Small-Scale Producers Seminar</i>	Live Oak, FL	<i>Timothy Croker • 352/392-1869</i>
June 28- July 2	<i>2nd World Conference on Women in Agriculture</i>	Washington, DC	<i>Quinton Wilform • 202/205-0056</i>
July 16	<i>Kentucky State University Field Day</i>	Frankfort, KY	<i>Marion Simon • 502/227-6437</i>
July 16-19	<i>2nd International Conference on Recirculating Aquaculture</i>	Roanoke, VA	<i>Virginia Tech • 540/231-5182</i>
August 10-14	<i>Crop Management Workshop: Sugar Beets</i>	Scottsbluff, NE	<i>Dean Yonts • 308/632-1246</i>
August 25	<i>Field Crop Diseases Diagnosis Workshop</i>	Ithaca, NE	<i>John Watkins • 402/472-2559</i>

The above entries reflect information available as *Small Farm Digest* went to press. For a more extensive list of events, see CSREES' Small Farm website (<http://www.reeusda.gov/smallfarm>). *Small Farm Digest* welcomes information on upcoming events. Please send submissions to Stephanie Olson, Editor, *Small*

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